



United States Attorney's Office
District of Columbia

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PRESS RELEASE

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District of Columbia Woman Pleads Guilty to Charges In Massive Credit Card Fraud & Identity Theft Scheme

She and others stole identifying information, obtained and accessed credit, made charges

WASHINGTON - Dionne N. Witherspoon, 38, pleaded guilty today before the Honorable Royce C. Lamberth, Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, to charges stemming from her participation in a scheme to steal identifying information, obtain credit and/or access victims' existing bank accounts, and purchase merchandise, pay bills, and pay D.C. parking tickets with the stolen credit and bank accounts.

Witherspoon, of the 1300 block of 6th Street NW, Washington, D.C., pleaded guilty to conspiracy and to fraud in connection with access devices, announced U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. She faces a statutory sentence of up to 20 years incarceration and a fine of \$250,000. Pursuant to the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Witherspoon faces a sentence of up to 121 months in prison and a fine of up to \$150,000. She is cooperating with authorities. Sentencing has not been scheduled, but is expected to take place in early 2011. The investigation is ongoing.

According to information submitted to the court by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein, Witherspoon and an unindicted co-conspirator, identified in court papers as "R.G.R.M.," organized a highly sophisticated identity theft and fraud ring from December 2006 through March 2010 that included more than 176 corporate and individual victims and at least 765 transactions resulting in approximately \$1,446,805 in fraudulently obtained lines of credit and charges to those lines of credit of approximately \$88,855.00.

Witherspoon put together an extensive network of co-conspirators who obtained victims' identifying information and bank account information by stealing mail from the mailboxes at personal residences located in the District of Columbia and elsewhere.

The network also stole credit card receipts from a medical office in the 7300 block of Wisconsin Avenue NW and from two locations of Johnson's Flower Shop, at 4200 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. and 10313 Kensington Ave., Kensington, Md. In addition, credit card receipts and prescriptions were stolen from the CVS Pharmacy at 13th and U Streets NW, and student identifying information was stolen from Howard University.

The stolen identification information was used to make fraudulent transactions on legitimate

credit accounts maintained by victims, to open and use on-line credit accounts, and /or to effect debit transactions directly from the victims' checking accounts to make "pay-by-phone" transactions.

Witherspoon asked others to accept delivery of merchandise shipped to their residences located in the District of Columbia and other places, which was purchased using the stolen or fraudulently obtained account information, in exchange for various benefits such as merchandise, payment of utility and cell phone bills, and payment of D.C. parking tickets. In addition, Witherspoon and others would receive "orders" for merchandise or to pay bills. The "customers" would give Witherspoon half of the face value of the cost for the merchandise, bill or outstanding parking tickets and Witherspoon would use stolen or fraudulently obtained account information to pay for the merchandise, bill or parking tickets.

Three others previously pled guilty in connection with this case. They are: Kimberly Hatton, 41, of Washington, D.C. , Peeair Bassil, 42, of Washington, D.C., and LaKisha Williams, 34, of Oxon Hills, Md. All of the defendants are cooperating with the government and sentencing dates have not yet been scheduled.

The case serves as a reminder that consumers are encouraged to check their credit reports annually to ensure that credit histories are accurate. They can obtain free copies of their credit reports by contacting www.annualcreditreport.com or by calling 1-877-322-8228.

At any time, if an unauthorized account or charges are discovered, consumers should contact the issuing credit card company or bank to report the fraud. In addition, a fraud alert can be placed on the individual's credit file. A fraud alert can help prevent an identity thief from opening accounts in another person's name.

The credit reporting companies can be contacted as follows:

Equifax, 1-800-525-6285, www.equifax.com
TransUnion, 1-800-680-7290, www.transunion.com
Experian, 1-888-397-3742, www.experian.com

The investigative work in this case was praised by U.S. Attorney Machen as well as Daniel S. Cortez, Inspector in Charge, Washington Division, U.S. Postal Inspection Service; District of Columbia Inspector General Charles J. Willoughby; Jeffrey Irvine, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Secret Service, and D.C. Metropolitan Police Department Chief Cathy L. Lanier.

They commended the work of Special Agent Bernadette Atwater of the D.C. Office of the Inspector General; Postal Inspector Dean Davis of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Special Agent Christopher Macomber of the U.S. Secret Service; Detective Michael Pavaro, of the Metropolitan Police Department, and the staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Paralegal Carolyn Cody and Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein, who is prosecuting the case.

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